

an introduction to
'ILM UL-KALAAM

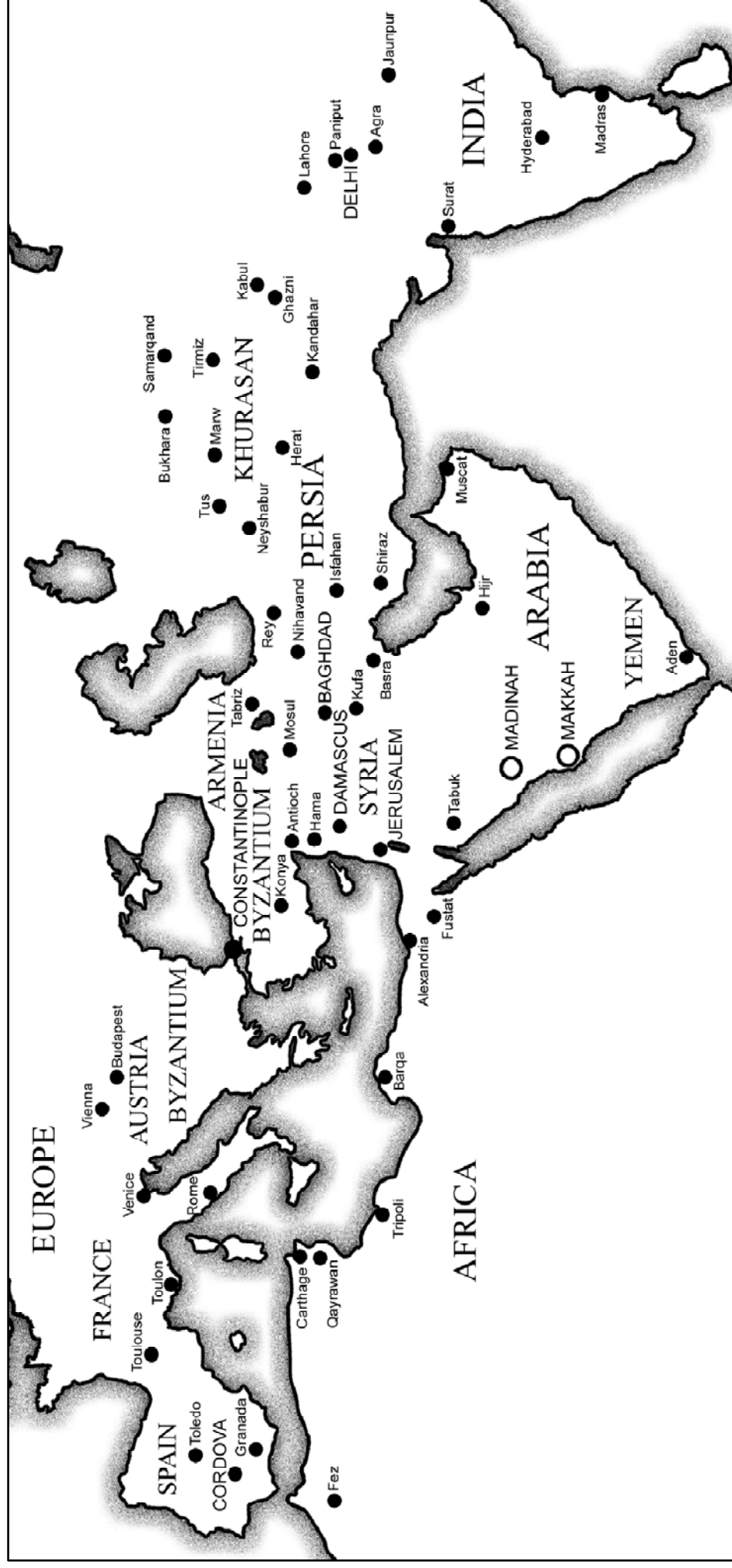


THE TWO SCHOOLS
OF
'AQIIDAH

INTRODUCTION

“...If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in two-thirds of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational beliefs, a founder of twenty terrestrial empires and one spiritual empire. Of all standards by which human greatness can be measured, we may well ask ... is there any man greater than Mohammed?...”

Alphonse Lamartine, "Histoire de la Turquie".



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

AN INTRODUCTION TO ‘ILM UL-KALAAM The Two Schools of ‘Aqiidah

By Mawlaanaa FEIZEL CHOTHIA

Allah declares in the Holy Qur’an :

هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

“Are those with knowledge equal to those without knowledge?” (Qur’an, 39:9)

يَرْفَعُ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ

“Allah will raise the status of those who believe among you and who are given knowledge by degrees.” (Qur’an, 58:11)

The Blessed Prophet Muhammad [s] spoke in truth :

مَنْ يُرِدِ اللَّهُ بِهِ خَيْرًا يُفَقِّهْهُ فِي الدِّينِ

“If Allah intends goodness for someone, He gives him (fiqh) understanding of the religion.”

إِنَّ الْعُلَمَاءَ وَرَثَةُ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَإِنَّ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ لَمْ يُوْرَثُوا دِينَارًا وَلَا دِرْهَمًا وَرَثَتُوا الْعِلْمَ

“Verily, the scholars are the inheritors of the Prophets. They do not leave behind gold or silver coins, but rather they leave behind knowledge.”

IIMAAN

Iimaan (true faith or belief) is obligatory (fard) and rewarded by paradise, while kufr (unbelief) is condemned and punished by hell. Therefore, every Muslim must know the basic tenets of iimaan, be convinced of them, and not merely imitate others.

Belief in something is possible only if it is clearly known and understood, not absurd nor self-contradictory. Iimaan is thus an exercise in thought and discernment, and therefore blind faith is condemned in Islaam.

‘Aqiidah

Linguistically, the word ‘ ‘aqiidah ’ means, ‘to bind, to fasten tightly or to strengthen’. Technically it means firm, unwavering belief (iimaan) which is not open to any doubt.

'Aqiidah specifically refers to the firm, unwavering belief (iimaan) in :

- 1) Allaah, who is One, having no partner in His Actions and right of worship, nor equal in His Names and Attributes. He is the Creator and cherisher of the Worlds who alone deserves all forms of worship.
- 2) His Angels (Malaa'ikah) who are created from light and are ever obedient.
- 3) All His Scriptures (Kutub), the Qur'aan being the best and last, abrogating all scriptures revealed before.
- 4) All His Prophets (Ambiyaa') and Messengers (Rusul), and that Muhammad [s] is the best and last of them, sent to all of mankind.
- 5) The Last Day (Yawm ul-Aakhir) and the various Signs heralding its approach.
- 6) Allaah's Decree (Qadr), the good and bad thereof, and that nothing occurs except by His will.
- 7) What is confirmed from the remaining matters of the Unseen such as the Throne ('Arsh), the Footstool (Kursii), Paradise (Jannah), Hell (Jahannam), the Bridge (Siraat), the Balance (Wazn), the Pleasure and Punishment in the Grave (Qabr), Resurrection (Ba'th), etc.

'Aqiidah also includes belief in all other related issues of importance like :

- the believers seeing their Lord in the hereafter and that it is impossible to see Allaah prior to that, in this world;

- the intercession of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], the other Prophets, the Angels, the righteous and others on the Day of Resurrection;
 - the Prophets being infallible and sinless;
 - the excellence and trustworthiness of the Sahaabah and that the best among them were Abuu Bakr [r], then 'Umar [r], then 'Uthmaan [r], and then 'Alii [r];
 - the existence of miracles (karamaat) by the pious saints (awliyaa') and the righteous;
 - that every Muslim possesses a degree of nearness to Allaah in accordance to the level of his or her faith;
 - and that the 'Ummah, as a whole, is infallible and will never agree upon any deviation
- NB: there is no infallibility for any single individual member of the Ummah.
- Etc.

The Salaf us-Saalihiin

The term 'Salaf us-Saalihiin' means 'Righteous Predecessors'. The Salaf us-Saalihiin primarily refer primarily to the first three generations (Khayr-ul-Quruun) of the Muslim community (Ummah) which include : the Sahaabah (Companions of the Prophet [s]), the Taabi'uun (Successors of the Sahaabah), and the Tab'ut-Taabi'iin (Successors of the Successors), then secondarily to all the righteous 'Ulamaa' (scholars) and Saalihuun (pious people) who have followed the noble example of the first three generations.

The 'Ulamaa' (scholars) and Saalihuun (pious people) who came came after them in subsequent generations are called Khalaf us-Saadiqiin which means 'Truthful Descendants'.

The 'Aqaa'id (beliefs) of Islaam were communicated by the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] to the Sahaabah. The Taabi'uun (successors), in their turn, learnt these beliefs directly from the Sahaabah, and their successors (Tab' ut-Taabi'iin) from them in turn. Thus the 'Aqaa'id of Islaam was communicated to the Khalaf us-Saadiqiin and the Ummah at large through numerous undeniable chains of authentic transmission (called 'Tawaatur' in Arabic).

Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah

The term 'Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah' means 'The People who follow the Sunnah and who adhere to the Majority (of the Muslims)'. The term Sunnii is often used as an abbreviation for Ahlus-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah.

Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah (or Sunnii) therefore refers to the overwhelming majority of the Muslims throughout time who have not divided into sects because of :

- 1) their adherence to the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s];
- 2) and because they have united upon the religious practice which the Salaf us-Saalihiin have unanimously agreed upon.

Furthermore, Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah (Sunnii Muslims) have always supported the Khaliifs and Sultaans (ie. those who rule on behalf of the Khaliif of the time) of Islaam throughout the ages and have not revolted against them.

NB: modern Muslim nation states and their leaders do not constitute legitimate Islaamic forms of leadership.

Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah are also referred to as 'At-Taa'ifat ul-Mansuurah' (the Victorious Group) and, in the hereafter, as Al-Firqat un-Naajiyyah (the Saved Group).

Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah (Sunnii Muslims) are the majority of the Muslim Ummah whom the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] promised would never collectively go astray.

NB: Individuals amongst them can go astray.

Therefore it is important to hold firmly to the 'Aqiidah of the majority of the Muslims. The many sects that have emerged over time, altogether account for only about one tenth of the Ummah. What differentiated these sects from the majority were their deviant beliefs, some of which we will discuss later.

The Sources of 'Aqiidah

The sources upon which 'Aqiidah is based are restricted solely to the Book of Allaah (the Qur'aan), the Sunnah (Hadiith) of the Prophet Muhammad [s] and, when necessary, the 'Ijmaa' (consensus) of the Salaf us-Saalihiin.

Therefore, any belief which contradicts the Qur'aan and the Sunnah - whether it be by way of reason ('aql), analogy (qiyaas), sensation (dhawq), an unveiling (kashf) of a mystic (suufii), an opinion (ra'y) of a scholar ('aalim) or anything similar - is rejected and not part of authentic Islaamic 'Aqiidah.

Sound reason and logic is always in agreement with the revelation (Qur'aan and the Sunnah), but when a contradiction is perceived between the two, revelation is always given priority over reason because Allaah's knowledge supercedes that of human beings.

Within the Ummah are those individuals who receive Ilhaam (inspiration) from Allaah. A true dream is also part of Ilhaam. Similarly the existence of faraasah (deep insight and perspicacity) is also a reality, and when any of these are found to be in agreement with the Qur'aan, Sunnah and Sharii'ah at large, then they can be considered reliable forms of guidance for the individual who experiences them. However, they are not to be considered a source of 'Aqiidah or Sharii'ah, and it is not incumbent upon other Muslims to accept these forms of inspiration.

Kalaam

The word 'kalaam' literally means 'speech, conversation or debate'. Technically Kalaam refers to the formal study of 'Aqiidah by which :

- 1) the contents of faith ('Aqaa'id) are clearly defined and irrefutably defended against any criticism,
- 2) are proven to be rational and not absurd nor inconsistent.

Kalaam is a system of rational debate which aims to protect the 'Aqaa'id of Islaam from heresy and deviation (Bid'ah).

Kalaam therefore provides compelling reasons for the individual Muslim to be personally convinced of the truth of Islaamic doctrine ('Aqiidah) and to thoroughly refute any criticism of it.

The Development of Kalaam

The development of Kalaam was very similar to that of Fiqh. During the lifetime of Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], whenever a question of belief arose he would personally clarify it. There was no need therefore to formally systematize 'Aqiidah, just as there was no need to do so for Fiqh, Tafsiir, or any other religious science. The same was largely true of the era of the Sahaabah (Companions). However, as Islaam rapidly conquered vast territories across the world, Muslims came into contact with diverse religious communities who challenged Islaamic beliefs and teachings. This challenge was compounded by the danger posed to Islaam by deviant Muslim individuals and ambitious politicians who attempted to alter the religion for their own ends. In response, the

‘Ulamaa’ (learned scholars) of Islaam began to compile and meticulously systematize Islaamic ‘Aqiidah, as taught by the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], into the discipline of ‘Ilm ul-Kalaam (The Science of Theological Debate) to assist Muslims in responding to and overcoming those threats.

During the 'Abbaasid period especially, starting around the middle of the second century after Hijrah, the introduction of Greek philosophy into Muslim lands led to various alien ideas taking root within Muslim society which were at odds with the ‘Aqiidah of Islaam. Various deviant sects, like the Mu’tazilah and Khawaarij, also emerged who questioned and attempted to reinterpret many fundamental beliefs and practices of Islaam. These sects often attempted to impose their deviant beliefs onto the Muslim masses by force.

Many ‘Ulamaa’ of Kalaam arose at this time to defend the ‘Aqiidah of the Muslims against these threats. Of them, two rose to prominence and became the most influential Kalaam experts in the Muslim world. From the many sources available to them as handed down by the Sahaabah from the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s], they developed advanced and sophisticated techniques to preserve and promote the ‘Aqiidah of Islaam. They were :

- 1) Imaam Abul-Hasan al-Ash’arii [rh]
(‘Ali ibn Ismaa’iil ibn Abii Bishr al-Ash'arii / 260-324 AH [873 - 935 CE])
- 2) Imaam Abuu Mansuur al-Maaturiidii [rh]
(Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmuud al-Maaturiidii / 238 - 333 AH [853 - 944 CE])

The ‘Aqiidah of Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah (ie. the Muslim majority) has since been authentically preserved by these two leaders of Kalaam, and the schools they established have been adhered to by all Sunnii Muslims across the world. It is known today simply as Islaam.

Amongst Sunnis, the Hanafii’s adhere to the school of Imaam Abuu Mansuur al-Maaturiidii [rh] while the Shaafi’iis, Maalikiis and most Hambaliis adhere to the school of Imaam Abul-Hasan al-Ash’arii [rh]

Inspite of the minor differences between the Ash'ariis and the Maaturiidiiis they represented two equally authentic approaches to the same ‘Aqiidah and have always been considered as one united group. Often both groups are collectively referred to as ‘Ash’ariis’.

For over a thousand years, since their establishment, Ash‘arii-Maaturiidii Kalaam has defined the beliefs of Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah.

The Distinguishing Features of Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah

Despite the sheer size and amazing diversity of Ahl-us-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah which represent over 90% of the Muslim world, they possess certain qualities and characteristics which distinguish them from all the deviant sects and religions that have emerged throughout the ages. These include the following :

- 1) They attach primary importance to the Qur’aan and Sunnah.
- 2) They embrace the teachings of the Qur’aan and the Sunnah in their entirety.
- 3) They follow the guidance of the Sahaabah (the Companions of the Prophet [s]) and all those who travelled upon their path in matters of belief and action.
- 4) They adhere to a median position, never going to extremes in any matter.
- 5) They combine between faith in Allaah's decree (Qadr) and affirming the possession of choice & free will of the human being, as well as the obligation of adopting Asbaab (necessary means) in all matters.
- 6) They call others to Allaah (Da’wah), command good and prohibit evil, wage Jihaad, revive the Sunnah, act to revive the religion (tajdiid), and establish the Sharii'ah in all matters, major and minor.
- 7) They strive to unite the Muslims and to eliminate all causes leading to conflict between them.
- 8) Notwithstanding the great distances between their lands and times, they possess a conformity in understanding and similarity in position and practice.
- 9) They spurn sectarianism and any disagreement in matters of ‘Aqiidah.
- 10) They do not befriend nor show enmity towards anyone due to any bond other than that of Islaam.
- 11) They show concern for the wellbeing of all Muslims, aid them, discharge their rights and prevent any injury from afflicting them.
- 12) They deal equitably and justly with each other and with others, and do not exploit nor wrong anyone.
- 13) They show kindness, mercy and good character towards all people.
- 14) They sincerely advise their leaders and the general body of Muslims.
- 15) They do not separate politics and other worldly matters from the Sharii’ah.
- 16) They do not divide the religion into an esoteric reality (haqiqah) to which only a select group adhere to in secrecy, and an exoteric law (Sharii'ah) to which the general body of Muslims adheres to in public.
- 17) They consider all Ahl-ul-Qiblah (anyone who faces the Ka’bah in their prayers) as Muslims.

- 18) They do not consider the perpetrator of a sin as outside the fold of Islaam, but merely a Muslim sinner whom Allaah may forgive or punish as He pleases.
- 19) They consider it impermissible to charge a Muslim as a Kaafir, unless there exists an incontrovertible evidence from the Sharii'ah which points to disbelief.
- 20) They consider the Qur'aan to be the literal uncreated speech of Allaah, its text and meaning preserved from any corruption until the Day of Resurrection.
- 21) They explain the Qur'aan by reference first to the Qur'aan, then the Sunnah, then the statements of the Sahaabah, then the statements of their followers (Taabi'uun) and consider it impermissible to comment on it by mere opinion
- 22) They affirm that while a human being does possess both an intent and a will, his intent and will is subordinate to the Intent and Will of the Creator.
- 23) They affirm that both the human being and his actions are creations of Allaah
- 24) They affirm that the life-spans of all men are decreed, the amount of their sustenance are apportioned, and that happiness or sorrow in the Hereafter has been determined upon mankind before they were created.
- 25) They affirm that it is impermissible to justify one's faults and sins by Allaah's decree (qadr). Rather one must repent from his faults and sins and the perpetrator of a sin is accountable for his actions.
- 26) They affirm that reliance and trust upon Allaah (tawakkul) does not negate embracing the proper means necessary.
- 27) They affirm that in those matters in which Muslims differ, it is required to refer to the Book of Allaah, the Sunnah of His Messenger (peace be upon him) and that which the righteous Salaf followed.
- 28) They affirm that the general rule concerning all Muslims is that they possess both good intent and sound belief, until the opposite becomes apparent. The general rule is to construe the words of a Muslim in the best manner.
- 29) They consider the Salaah (formal prayer) performed behind a Muslim whose true nature is hidden is valid.
- 30) They consider it impermissible to forsake the congregational and Friday prayers (Jumu'ah Salaah).
- 31) They affirm that Khilaafah and Saltanah (those who rule on behalf of the Khaliif) (ie. political authority) over the Muslims is decided by either the consensus (Ijmaa') of the Ummah or through the oath of allegiance (Bay'ah) given by those among the Ummah who possess the right to appoint or remove a ruler (ahl-ul-hall wal-'aqd) (ie. those in positions of political power and authority).
- 32) They consider it obligatory to obey and sincerely advise anyone who seizes Khilaafah or Saltanah by force, provided that he implements the Sharii'ah and unites the Muslim Ummah under him.

- 33) They affirm that it is Haraam (forbidden) under all circumstances to revolt against the Khaliif or Sultaan, unless he openly renounces Islaam.
- 34) They affirm that it is required to perform Salaah, Hajj and Jihaad with the Khaliif or Sultaan of the Muslims, even if they are tyrannical.
- 35) They consider it haraam (forbidden) for the Muslims to come to military conflict between themselves. But if two Muslim powers come to conflict then it is obligatory for the general Muslim population to remain neutral and not support either party.
- 36) They consider it permissible to fight those Muslims who revolt against the Khaliif or Sultaan, when one cannot stop them with lesser measures. This is determined according to circumstances and the benefits to be achieved for the Ummah at large.
- 37) They affirm that the Sahaabah (Companions of the Prophet [s]) are the best of the Ummah. To love them is true religion and faith while to hate them is disbelief and hypocrisy.
- 38) They affirm that it is obligatory to love and support the Family of the Household of the Messenger [s] of Allaah (ie. Ahl-ul-Bayt), and to honour and acknowledge the merit of his wives, who are the Mothers of the Faithful (Ummahaat-ul-Mu'miniin).
- 39) They affirm that to wage Jihaad in the path of Allaah against Kaafir powers, until the Day of Judgement, is obligatory upon those Muslims who possess political authority .
- 40) They affirm that to command to good (al-ma'ruf) and forbid evil (al-munkar) is obligatory upon all Muslims, according to their ability.

The Differences between the Ash'ariis and the Maaturiidiis

The Maaturiidiis do not differ from the 'Ash'ariis except on six minor issues, which are as follows :

- 1) Ash'ariis affirm that if Allaah willed He could, in principle, punish the obedient and reward the disobedient, since He is free to do anything. However He has promised through revelation to reward the obedient and punish the disobedient; while the Maaturiidiis affirm that Allaah must in principle reward the obedient and punish the disobedient, because His doing the opposite is absurd and He is never guilty of absurdity.
- 2) Ash'ariis affirm that man is required to believe in Allaah because of revelation, not merely because he is endowed with human reason, and that he has no obligation to believe prior to revelation; while Maaturiidiis affirm that man is

required to believe in Allaah even before revelation by the mere fact of possessing reason.

3) Ash'ariis affirm that divine attributes of agency such as creation, giving life, giving death, resurrecting the dead and so forth, are temporal; while the Maaturidiis affirm they all are manifestations of a single beginninglessly eternal attribute termed takwiin (existentiation).

4) Ash'ariis affirm that Allaah's own beginninglessly eternal speech may be heard, while the Maaturidiis affirm that it may not.

5) Ash'ariis affirm that in principle Allaah may impose moral obligations that man cannot endure; while Maaturidiis affirm that this is impossible, though both agree that in practice Allaah never does.

6) Ash'ariis hold two views about the possibility of Prophets committing lesser sins that are not sordid: the first being that they are possible for them to absentmindedly commit, while the second is that they are not. The Maaturidiis say this is impossible, and that they are divinely protected from both major and minor sins.

NB: These six issues are relatively minor, and mainly serve to underscore the broader agreement of the two schools on all other primary issues. Both schools together therefore represent Sunnii orthodoxy (Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah) and no clear-cut lines of distinction between the Ash'ariyyah and the Maaturidiyyah can be discerned in the later history of Muslim thought and belief.

1) **Imaam al-Ash'arii** [rh]
260 - 324 AH [873 - 935 CE]

Abul Hasan Alii ibn Ismaa'iil al-Ash'arii [rh] was born in Basrah (in modern Iraq) into a distinguished Muslim family which traced its lineage back to the famous Sahaabii (Companion of the Prophet [s]) Abuu Muusaa al-Ash'arii [r]. A member of the Arab-Muslim aristocracy by birth, Abul Hasan al-Ash'arii received a careful and thorough education from early childhood.

Ismaa'iil, the father of al-Ash'arii was also a learned and highly respected scholar of Basrah. Sadly he died when al-Ash'arii was still a youngster, and this drove the family into poverty. Young al-Ash'arii thus suffered considerable personal hardship until his mother married Abuu 'Alii Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhaab al-Jubbaa'ii, who was one of the foremost students of Waasil ibn 'Ataa', the founder of the Mu'tazilii sect. The Mu'tazilah were proponents of philosophical rationalism who gave precedence to reason over revelation.

Based at the Mu'tazilii Basrah headquarters, al- Jubaa'ii was widely revered as one of the great exponents of Mu'tazilii doctrine. Brought up and educated under the guidance and care of this leading figure of philosophical rationalism, al-Ash'arii mastered Arabic grammar, literature, Islaamic sciences and the philosophical and theo-logical doctrines of the Mu'tazilah from an early age. As a teacher and writer, al-Jubbaa'ii was a powerful exponent of Mu'tazilii doctrine, but he was not noted for his debating or oratory skills.

Raised and nurtured in the home of the Mu'tazilah, al-Ash'arii became a committed and proficient exponent of their beliefs and doctrines. He mastered philosophical rationalism and successfully engaging in debates and discussions concerning the finer points of their philosophy and theology while still a teenager. His vast erudition and debating skills soon earned him much acclaim, even during al-Jubbaa'ii's own lifetime. Thus everyone expected al-Ash'arii to follow in the footsteps of his aged teacher, mentor and stepfather and become a champion of Mu'tazilii doctrine after the latter's death.

When al-Jubbaa'ii died in Basrah in 915 CE, al-Ash'arii was forty-two and already widely recognised as the most learned and accomplished Mu'tazilii theologian of his generation, and the undisputed leader and champion of this philosophical creed. Whilst everyone expected al-Ash'arii [rh] to succeed al-Jubbaa'ii as the pre-eminent leader of the Mu'tazilah, events took an unexpected turn.

According to al-Ash'arii himself, the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s] appeared to him in a dream and instructed him to abandon the deviance of the Mu'tazilah and champion the cause of normative Islaam (Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah).

Knowing the inspiration of true dreams to be an important source of guidance, this Prophetic intervention proved decisive as far as al-Ash'arii was concerned. Although he considered himself to be a defender of the Mu'tazilii doctrine which he rationalized to be correct, the Prophet's [s] personal repudiation of the Mu'tazilah shook al-Ash'arii to his core. He thus confined himself to his house for two weeks, enduring a period of intense prayer and deep soul-searching and coming to terms with this new insight. After nearly forty years of learning, refining, mastering and hair-splitting debates and discussion on the finer points of Mu'tazilii philosophy and theology, it was now apparent to him to all be false and spurious. It was as if al-Ash'arii [rh] woke up from a deep slumber by the

unexpected visitation of the Holy Prophet [s], coupled with the Divine light (nur) and blessing (barakah) which was now bestowed on him.

After fifteen days of deep reflection, intense introspection and intellectual realignment, he emerged from his house on a Friday afternoon - prior to Salaat-ul-Jumu'ah - and went straight to the central mosque in Basrah, which was packed to its maximum capacity. He stepped onto the minbar (pulpit) and delivered his historic announcement. This announcement was to mark the beginning of the end for philosophical rationalism and the resurgence of normative Islaam.

In his unique and inimitable style, al-Ash'arii [rh] proclaimed, "He who knows me, knows who I am, and he who does not know me, let him know that I am Abul Hasan 'Alii al-Ash'arii; that I used to maintain that the Qur'aan is created, that eyes of men shall not see Allaah, and that the creatures create their actions. Behold! I repent that I have been a Mu'tazilii, I renounce their false opinions and I now take the opportunity to refute the Mu'tazilah and expose their inconsistencies and depravity."

His public repudiation of Mu'tazilii doctrine represented a milestone in Islamic intellectual history, for the battle line between Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah and philosophical rationalism now became clear - especially as the Mu'tazilii rationalists lost one of their most formidable champions.

As expected, a reinvigorated al-Ash'arii [rh] launched a systematic and full-blown attack on the philosophical and theological foundations of the Mu'tazilii creed. Having studied their ideas and thought under the guidance of its most prominent thinkers like al-Jubbaa'ii, and having mastered the art of philosophical and theological discourse, he now became the Mu'tazilah's most formidable intellectual adversary. Unable to answer his cogent and stinging philosophical and theological assaults on the very foundations of their school of thought, the Mu'tazilah suddenly found themselves stranded in an intellectual no-man's land.

It is related that Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh] once asked his erstwhile teacher Abuu 'Alii al-Jubbaa'ii, "What is your opinion regarding three brothers, one of whom dies obedient, another disobedient, and the third as a child?" al-Jubbaa'ii replied, "The first will be rewarded, the second punished with Hellfire, and the third will neither be punished nor rewarded." Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh] then asked, "But what if the third one says, 'O Lord, why did you give me death at a young age and not leave me to grow up so I could be obedient to you and thus enter Paradise?'"

Jubbaa'ii replied that Allaah would respond, "I knew that if you had grown up you would have disobeyed and thus entered Hellfire, so it was better for you to have died young." So Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh] said, "If the second one says, 'My Lord, why did you not let me [too] die young so I would not have disobeyed and entered Hellfire?' What will the Lord say then?" Jubbaa'ii was confounded and remained silent.

Al-Ash'arii's [rh] repudiation of Mu'tazilii doctrine was both comprehensive and monumentally effective. He composed more than ninety books and treatises on all aspects of 'Aqiidah (Islaamic beliefs) and theology (Kalaam), in refutation of the Mu'tazilah, as well as aspects of Islamic epistemology and philosophy. In so doing, he developed a powerful synthesis between reason ('aql) and revelation (wah'y), and between philosophical rationalism and Islaamic beliefs & law. His most famous books included Al-Ibaanah an-Usul-id-Diyaanah (The Delineation of Religious Principles), Kitaab-ul-Luma' (The Luminous Book) and Maqaalat-ul-Islaamiyyiin (Beliefs of Muslims). In these, and other books, he provided a systematic interpretation and exposition of core Islamic theological beliefs and concepts based on his profound knowledge and understanding of the original Islamic scriptural sources on the one hand, and thorough acquaintance with the methods of the philosophers and the speculative theologians on the other.

As philosophical rationalists, the Mu'tazilah believed in the pre-eminence of human intellect; that is to say, they considered Divine revelation (Wah'y) to be subservient to human reason ('aql). Not surprisingly, they interpreted fundamental Islaamic concepts — the Oneness of Allaah (tawhid), His Divine Names and Attributes (al-Asmaa' was-Sifaat), and the nature of the Qur'aan - from a purely rationalistic perspective. This attitude was leading the Ummah down the path to secularism.

The majority of Muslims (Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah) not only considered such an interpretation of Islaam to be Bid'ah (deviant innovation) and blameworthy, they also considered the Mu'tazilah to be heretics and innovators in religious matters. Led by Imaam Ahmad ibn Hanbal [rh], the Islaamic scholars of the Ahl-us-Sunnah vehemently opposed the philosophical interpretation of Islamic theological matters. Many of them considered the apparent (zaahirii) meaning of the Divine revelation (the Qur'aan) and the Prophetic traditions (Hadiith) to be sufficient for human guidance. By contrast, Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh], like Imaam Abuu Haniifah [rh] before him, took the middle path and argued that revelation and reason were equally indispensable for formulating a balanced interpretation and understanding of Islaamic thought and practice. He therefore

devoted all his time and energy to successfully reconciling these two seemingly opposing positions. In so doing, Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh] demolished the heretical creed of the rationalists, and reiterated normative Islaamic positions on all important theological matters.

When the 'Abbaasid Khaliif, al-Mutawakkil 'ala-Allaah ascended the Abbaasid throne in 847 CE, he expelled all the adherents and supporters of Mu'tazilii doctrine from the highest echelons of power and reinstated normative Islaam (Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah) as the official creed of the Abbaasid Khilaafah. Despite this, the intellectual legacy of Waasil ibn 'Ataa and his Mu'tazilii creed persisted within the intellectual and cultural circles of the Khilaafah. But thanks to Imaam al-Ash'arii's [rh] sustained and uncompromising critique of philosophical rationalism, the Mu'tazilii creed was eventually rooted out from the intellectual and cultural lives of Muslims.

Imaam Al-Ash'arii [rh] was not only an outstanding Islaamic intellectual, he was also one of the greatest religious thinkers of all time. Not surprisingly, his religious thought and intellectual legacy continues to exert a profound influence on the way Muslims think, behave and lead their lives to this day. He died in 936 CE at the age of sixty eight and was buried at Baab al-Basrah (the Gate of Basrah). The 'Aqiidah of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah bears his name and Muslims the world over refer to themselves as Ash'arii's to this day.

2) **Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh]** 238 - 333 AH [853 - 944 CE]

Abuu Mansuur, Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmuud al-Maaturiidii [rh] was born in Maatuuriid, a district of Samarqand in present-day Uzbekistan, in the year 853 CE during the reign of the 'Abbaasid Khaliif al Mutawakkil. He was a descendant of the renowned Sahaabii (Companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad [s]), Abuu Ayyuub al Ansaarii [r].

Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] was a prominent faqiih (jurist) of the Hanafii Madh'hab and a prolific author of numerous works in fiqh, usuul-ul-Fiqh, tafsiir, and kalaam. He lived the life of a zaahid (ascetic) and numerous karaamaat (miracles) are attributed to him. He was brought up in the advanced academic and cultural environment of his native Samarqand which was controlled by the powerful Samaanid Sultanate, who ruled Persia from 261 till 389 AH. The

Samaanid's were renowned as patrons of science and literature, and gathered around their court the most renowned scholars of the age.

He received a thorough education in all the Islaamic sciences from the following illustrious scholars : Abuu Nasr al-'Ayaadii [rh], Abuu Bakr Ahmad ibn Is'haaq al Faqiih as Samarqandii [rh], Nusayr ibn Yahyaa al Balkhii [rh], Muhammad ibn Muqaatil ar-Raazii [rh] and Imaam Abuu Bakr Ahmad Al-Juzjaanii [rh] , all of whom were students of the disciples of Imaam Abuu Haniifah [rh] and his famous students, Imaam Abuu Yuusuf [rh] and Imaam Muhammad Ash-Shaybaanii [rh].

Although the elder of the two and having upheld the beliefs of mainstream Sunnii Islaam long before Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh], both Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] and Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh] strove in the same cause of defending the 'Aqiidah of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah against the onslaught of deviant innovators, especially the Mu'tazilah.

While Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] insisted on unquestioning acceptance of the revealed text, namely the Qur'aan and Sunnah, he recognized the necessity of reason to properly understand the revealed texts and to respond appropriately to intellectual challenges that confront Muslims. He also supported using allegorical interpretation in the Qur'aan where necessary. Therefore, like Imaam al-Ash'arii [rh], he struck a balance between two extremes, avoiding the subjugation of revelation to reason (a characteristic of the Mu'tazilah) as well as the complete subjugation of reason to revelation (a characteristic of the Dhaahiriyyah - also pronounced Zhaahiriyyah - meaning 'literalists').

Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] defined iimaan (true faith) as 'tasdiq bil-qalb' or 'affirmation with the heart expressed by verbal confession (iqraar bil-lisaan). For Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] good deeds (a'maal) are not a part of faith, but certainly enhance faith.

Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] refuted the Mu'tazilah in his defense of the Attributes (names) of Allaah as eternally subsisting in the Essence of Allaah, so he insisted that the expressions 'Allaah is eternally the Creator' and 'Allaah has been creating from eternity' are equally valid, even though the created world is temporal.

Furthermore, Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] staunchly defended the ‘Vision of Allaah’ (ru’yah) by believers in the hereafter, but rejected the possibility of that vision being encompassed by the physical eyes of human beings (idraak).

In recognition of his great scholarship and profound knowledge of Islaam, and given his invaluable services to the Ummah, people conferred on him the title of Imaam-ul-Hudaa (Leader of True Guidance) and Imaam-ul-Mutakallimiin (Leader of the Theologians). He penned numerous books on tafsiiir, kalaam, and ‘usuul including - Kitaab Ta’wiilaat ul-Qur’aan , Kitaab Ma’khadh ush-Sharii’ah, Kitaab ul Jadal, Kitaab ut-Tawhiid and Kitaab ul-‘Usuul amongst others.

Imaam al-Maaturiidii [rh] died in the year 944 CE at the age of 90 and was buried in Samarqand. The Maaturiidii school of Kalaam (scholastic theology) he founded was named after him and came to be widely recognised as the second of the two authentic schools of Sunnii Kalaam along with the Ash’arii school. The ‘Aqiidah of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa’ah is often referred to as Ash’arii Maaturiidii ‘Aqiidah. Being the larger of the two schools, the Maaturiidii’s are rightly considered to represent the largest theological school ever, as well as the more dominant, enjoying a preeminent status as the theological school of choice for most Muslims across the world, including both the ‘Uthmaanii (Ottoman) Khilaafah and the Mughal Sultanate, the last two great Islaamic powers.

Some Misguided Muslim Sects

The Mu’tazilah

The word Mu’tazilah means ‘to withdraw or disassociate’. The Mu’tazilah sect originated in Basrah in the early second century of the Hijrah, when Waasil ibn ‘Ataa withdrew from the circle of Imaam Hasan al-Basrii [rh] after a theological dispute regarding whether a person guilty of major sins remains a Muslim.

The Sunnah practice of Islaam as taught by the Prophet Muhammad [s] and his Companions continued to be taught during this period by Imaam Hasan al-Basrii [rh] who was a student of the fourth Khaliif, Sayyidunaa ‘Alii ibn Abii Taalib [r]. Imaam Hasan al-Basrii [rh] said, “‘Ataa has withdrawn from the community (jamaa’ah),” and thereafter, he and his followers were called the Withdrawers, or Mu’tazilah.

The Mu'tazilah named themselves Ahl-ut-Tawhiid wal-'Adl (The People of Divine Oneness and Justice), claiming that their theology grounded the Islaamic belief system in reason.

Over time, the Mu'tazilah split into more than twenty subgroups, such as the Waasiliyyah, Hudhaliyyah, and Nazzaamiyyah, each named after their respective founders, and some of them even considering the other subgroups to be unbelievers.

Unlike the majoritarian Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah, the Mu'tazilah denied Allaah's attributes (ie. sifaat - His Names). Furthermore, they denied the Beatific Vision (ie. seeing Allaah) by the dwellers of Paradise. They believed that Allaah creates His speech in a body and that the Qur'aan is therefore created and not His eternal unchanging speech. The Mu'tazilah also insisted that human reason is the ultimate determiner of truth while the majority Sunnii Muslims affirm that revelation is the ultimate determiner of truth. They also believe that reason dictates that Allaah, by his justice, must punish the sinful, while Sunnii Muslims believe that revelation affirms that Allaah, by his mercy, can forgive the sinner. Likewise, the Mu'tazilah insist that human beings are free agents and not constrained by Qadr (ie. destiny) and many similar erroneous beliefs which have been unanimously rejected by the Ummah over the ages.

This being said, it must be remembered that although such beliefs are corrupt and invalid, the 'Ulamaa of Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah never charged the Mu'tazilah with apostasy (irtidaad), nor did they regard it permissible to label them Kaafir (disbelievers) because of their views. However, they did classify them as guilty of Bid'ah (deviant innovation) and transgression.

The 'Uncreatedness' of the Qur'aan

The debate over the 'createdness' of the Qur'aan goes back to the fundamental issue of the exact relationship between the divine attributes / names (asmaa') and the divine essence (dhaat / zhaat). The Mu'tazilah, depending upon reason alone, insisted that the answer had to be 'either / or', one or the other, not both : either the attributes were the same as the essence, or they were different from the essence. Logically, it is impossible for a thing to be the same and different at one and the same time. They opted for making the attributes (asmaa') the same as the essence. Having done so, they concluded that the Qur'aan had to be considered other than Allaah's essence, and hence it was created.

In contrast, the majority of the Muslim Ummah (Ahl-us-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah) affirmed that Allaah could not be made to fit into the constraints of human reason and logic. We cannot claim to understand Allaah in the same way that we understand the things of this world. 'either / or' may work for created things, but it does not necessarily work for the Uncreated, which belongs to an utterly different order of reality.

The Ahl-us-Sunnah, led by Imaam al-'Ash'arii [rh] declared a formula that breaks the laws of logic : "The attributes (asmaa') are neither Allaah nor other than Allaah." Inasmuch as Allaah's speech is the same as Allaah and the Qur'aan is Allaah's speech, the Qur'aan had to be eternal. Hence, Ahl-us-Sunnah affirmed its eternity, but did not deny that the Qur'aan was created inasmuch as it was written in books and recited by tongues.

This formula on the attributes (asmaa') declares correctly that Allaah is both incomparable (tanziih) in His Essence (dhaat) and yet similar (tashbiih) at the same time in His Attributes (asmaa'). This similarity (tashbiih) is necessary as it allows us as humble human beings to understand Allaah in a meaningful and relevant way. While Allaah's tanziih (incomparable essence) protects us from anthropomorphism, polytheism and pantheism.

Another danger associated with the incorrect notion of the 'createdness' of the Qur'aan, is that it implied that just as the Qur'aan was created in time and responded to events and circumstances in time, as times and circumstances change so too should it's rulings. Aside from the danger this false belief posed to the survival of Islaam as a religion, it also opened the door to the rulers becoming absolute despots by changing the laws of Islaam to suit their own whims.

The Qadariyya

The Qadariyyah (Libertarians) were the proponents of absolute free will, or libertarianism. The ideology of the Qadariyyah is shared by the Shii'ah and the Mu'tazilah, both of whom deny that Allaah creates evil, but rather ascribe to mankind the creation of evil. As such they deny the absolute belief in Qadr (predestination), an elementary component of Islaamic belief.

The Shii'ah

In 632 CE, the holy Prophet Muhammad [s] died leaving no designated successor, so prominent Muslims came together to choose a leader. Through a

system of meritocracy, they elected Sayyidunaa Abuu Bakr [r] and gave him the title Khaliifah, which means ‘successor’ or ‘viceroy’. A few decades thereafter, a small seditious group, comprised of newly conquered idolaters, Zoroastrians and Jews, emerged which attempted to destabilise the nascent Khilaafah from within by fomenting civil strife and political division through deceptively insisting that political authority was reserved exclusively for the descendants of the Prophet's [s] family, beginning with 'Alii [r], the Prophet's [s] cousin and son-in-law, and his descendants. This notion was rejected by the overwhelming majority of Muslims including 'Alii [r] himself, but it did cause confusion among some newly converted peoples who were accustomed to dynastic rule and attributing a semi-divine status to their rulers.

Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] was eventually elected as the fourth Khaliif by the Muslim Ummah, but the seditious groupings had set in motion a series of events that would eventually lead to civil war. These groupings came to be known collectively as the Shii'ah, which literally means 'sect' or 'faction'. After the death of Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r], the Khilaafah was stabilised by Khaliif Mu'aawiyah [r] but the seditious schism endured. Beginning as a political movement, the Shii'ah later evolved into a religious sect. They currently represent about five percent of the Muslim world.

Furthermore, the Shii'ah are not a single homogeneous group. There exists a multitude of disparate factions and subdivisions within their religious order, each with their own set of beliefs and practices - the Kaysaaniyyah : Mukhtaariyyah, Haashimiyyah, Bayaaniyyah; Zaydiyyah : Jaaruudiyyah, Sulaymaaniyyah; Imaamiyyah : Ja'fariyyah, Baaqiriyyah, Naawusiyyah, Muusawiyyah, Ithnaa 'Ashariyyah; Ghaaliyyah : Sabaa'iyyah, 'Albaa'iyyah, Mughiriyyah, Mansuuriyyah, Khattaabiyyah, Hishaamiyyah and Ismaa'iliyyah Shii'ah to name a few.

Amongst the above mentioned are those who indulged in such exaggeration that they elevated Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] to the pedestal of divinity and considered him an incarnation of Allaah on earth. Others believed that Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] and his progeny held an exalted station such as could not be reached by any Angel, Prophet or Messenger. There were yet others who regarded him to be designated by Allaah Himself to be the Khaliif, Imaam and ruler of the Muslim territories after the Prophet [s]. They thought that Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] was sinless, had divine authority over the universe and knew the unseen. Others believed that Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] was the fittest person to be raised up as the Prophet and that Allaah actually intended to make him the final Prophet and sent the angel

Jibraa'iil [a] to him with the Qur'aan, but Jibraa'iil [a] made a mistake and carried it to the Prophet Muhammad [s]. Some believed in reincarnation and transmigration of souls. Yet others believed that Allaah is human in form. Many believed that religion consists only in acknowledgement of the Imaam and, thus, they renounced all other religious obligations and practices.

Despite the innumerable, often antagonistic and irreconcilable, doctrinal and juristic differences between the Shii'ah factions, a common belief shared by all is that of the Imaamah of 'Alii [r]. They hold that his Khilaafah and Imaamah were based on divine designation and appointment. They maintain also that the Khilaafah must remain in Sayyidunaa 'Alii's [r] family. According to them the Imaamate is not a civil matter, validly settled by the will of the people appointing an Imaam of their own choosing. They believe that it is a fundamental principal of faith and a basic element of religion and those who do not acknowledge the Khilaafah and Imaamah of 'Alii [r] are rank hypocrites and disbelievers, or at the very least flagrant evildoers and rebels. There is much dispute and controversy among them on the question of how the Imaamah is transmitted after Sayyidunaa 'Alii [r] from one Imaam to another; and, so, whenever the occasion arises for its transmission, various conflicting opinions and points of view are proposed.

Because they are so diverse, not all the Shii'ah can be declared outright disbelievers inspite of being misled in so many respects. Only those factions who deny or contradict what is necessarily known to be a requisite of Islaamic belief are disbelievers.

The Khawaarij

The word Khawaarij means 'separatists or seceders'. The Khawaarij were the first sect to split from mainstream Islaam. After the peace arbitration between Khaliif 'Alii [r] and Amiir Mu'aawiyah [r] a small number of extremists separated from the Ummah and declared all Muslims to be Kaafir. They went on to assassinate Khaliif 'Alii [r] but failed in their attempts to assassinate Amiir Mu'aawiyah [r]. Even more extreme than the Mu'tazilah, they held human actions to be an integral part of iimaan and thus considered anyone guilty of a sin to be a Kaafir (disbeliever), therefore worthy of the death penalty. They wreaked havoc across the Muslim world for many centuries but were eventually subdued and exterminated. In recent history they have re-merged in the guise of extremist Wahhaabiism.

The Jabriyyah

The belief of the Jabriyyah is diametrically opposed to that of the Qadariyyah. They had a fatalistic outlook and believed that human beings have no free will in their actions at all. They say that humanity is under compulsion, or jabr, just as a feather is at the mercy of the winds, and that people have no choice even in their intentional deeds. A subgroup of the Jabriyyah are the Jahmiyyah.

The Jahmiyya

They were followers of Jahm ibn Safwan al-Samarqandii (d. 128 AH / 745 CE). Like the Mu'tazilah, they rejected the eternal Divine Names (Asmaa') of Allaah. They insist that the Qur'aan was created, and therefore needing modification as time passed. And they believed that that Jannah (paradise) and Jahannam (hell) are not eternal.

The Karraamiyyah

Their name and beliefs are traced to Abuu 'Abdillah Muhammad ibn Karraam (d. 255 AH/868 CE). The Karraamiyyah believe that Allaah is a material being who has a physical body with multiple components. They also believe that Allaah occupies physical space and time. The Karraamiyyah divided into twelve further subjects.

The Murji'ah

The word Murji'ah is derived from the Arabic 'rajaa' which means 'vain hope'. The Murji'ah claimed that sinfulness does not harm one, but that Allaah forgives all wrongdoing as long as one has iimaan (faith), thus going to the opposite extreme of the Khawaarij. Because of this false belief, they frequently neglected their religious duties, including Salaah.



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